

**The Priorities of Faith:**  
**Pervading the Secular Curriculum**  
**with the Christian Ethic:**  
**A South Pacific Model**

by

**Gerald F Clifford**  
Education Director  
South Pacific Division  
Sydney, Australia

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**THE PRIORITIES OF FAITH:****PERVADING THE SECULAR CURRICULUM WITH THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC:  
A SOUTH PACIFIC MODEL.****ABSTRACT**

This paper identifies and examines the tension between Christian educators endeavoring to operate schools within the parameters of the Christian philosophy and ethic on the one hand and government education agencies imposing on the private sector an academic curriculum designed after the humanist school of thought on the other. In many countries the Government grants approval to operate schools and also prescribes the curriculum. Conformity to the curriculum is a condition of registration of a school and enables the school to enter students for public examinations, thus permitting them to matriculate into a university or college. A model, designed by the Department of Education of the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is presented for a curriculum development program integrating Christian values into the secular curriculum using practicing teachers on advisory and working committees.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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**G.F. CLIFFORD**  
Education Director  
Seventh-day Adventist Church  
South Pacific Division  
Sydney, N.S.W. Australia.  
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**THE PRIORITIES OF FAITH:****THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC PERVADES THE SECULAR CURRICULUM:****A SOUTH PACIFIC MODEL**

The title "Priorities of Faith" presents the real thrust for this paper. It denotes an ordering of knowledge and a ranking of values consistent with Christian philosophy, religious beliefs and ethic.

In the sub-title the phrase "Christian ethic" refers to that type of educational experience which promotes a Christian world view with the distinctiveness of the Christian faith that touches the entire range of life and learning.<sup>1</sup> It also suggests and implies that at least one other value system exists. The term "secular" frequently connotes the alternative to Christian although "not-Christian" would be more descriptive if perhaps a little harsh. Yet by definition the term secular refers to activities "not concerned with or related to religion" or "related to worldly as opposed to sacred things".<sup>2</sup> Secular in the context of this paper then refers to a society who perceive religion or religious things as having no part in the education process. While it is recognised that the word "curriculum" generally refers to the total range of learning experiences, both within and without the classroom, in the context of this paper the term applies to the formal academic, vocational and skill subjects. In the development of this paper the author has included some material prepared for and presented to the members of the executive committee of the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in May, 1987 when many of the issues facing private schools in Australia were causing concern in the Christian community and when initial plans were being formulated for the establishing of a Curriculum Development Unit.<sup>3</sup>

**CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR APPROACHES**

This essay will purposely be limited to comments and observations on the relationship between Christian education - and more specifically Adventist Christian education - and the

various secular education programs operating within the territories of the South Pacific Division <sup>4</sup> as typified in the Australian education scene. Approval to operate a school or college in Australia is granted by a state Department of Education. The curriculum is largely prescribed by the same authority. Acceptance of and conformity to the prescribed curriculum is a condition of registration and approval to function. Student progress is evaluated through a series of state controlled public examinations. Matriculation into tertiary institutions is competitive and essentially on the basis of performance in these examinations. This system, traditional in Europe has been adopted by many countries in the South Pacific basin that have been directly connected to or influenced in one way or another by the culture and tradition of these old world countries.

Those who hold to the Judeo-Christian ethic believe in an Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of life - in a divine origin. The Christian, having accepted salvation from God, finds great satisfaction in a lifestyle in harmony with God's will. Truth, as revealed by God, leads to man's ultimate fulfilment. In between creation and restoration he believes that there can be no real self-fulfilment, happiness, love or justice which does not ultimately issue from God. His whole life and all that impacts on it is predicated on a firm belief in Divine Providence.

On the other side of the coin the secular humanist believes that he is capable of self-fulfilment and therefore of determining his own destiny.

"Modern humanism bases its outlook on the actual nature of man and of the universe of which man is a part and product. It sees man as an evolving, striving creature endowed with creative potentialities through which the problems facing persons and communities can be solved. It does not believe in absolutes or in divine intervention. This places the responsibility for the future of life in this planet squarely on the shoulders of man himself. It calls for the fulfilment of each individual through the actualization of his own possibilities, and for the improvement of world society through the constructive co-operation of people and nations. Humanism is in conflict with Christianity over such dogmas as the reality of absolute revelation, the fall of man, the divinity of Jesus, and the intervention of God in the processes of the universe."<sup>5</sup>

Before examining the philosophical position of those who espouse what is generally understood as Christian education and those who promote a secular education program, it might be appropriate to set out the major differences between the secular humanist position and the Judeo-Christian ethic.

Table I presents the three main areas of difference.

**TABLE I**

<u>SECULAR HUMANISM</u>	<u>JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ETHIC</u>
<p><b>1. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD</b> Traditional dogmatic authoritarian religions that place revelation of God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. There is insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural God. As non-theists, humanists begin with humans not god, nature not deity.</p>	<p><b>1. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD</b> The ultimate first cause of all existence is God who created heaven and earth. Genesis 1:1 - 2:4; Isaiah 45:12; Malachi 2:10; Colossians 1:16; Mark 10:6, 13:19.</p>
<p><b>2. AUTHORITY AND TRUTH</b> Rejected are those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities. No divine purpose or providence for the human species can be discovered. Humans are responsible for what they are or will become. No deity will save them; they must save themselves.</p>	<p><b>2. AUTHORITY AND TRUTH</b> God is the ultimate source of all truth, or authoritative knowledge. God has revealed to man those eternal truths by which man may ultimately fulfil his potential. God has the highest purpose for the human species, revealed by the Ten Commandments. Man is not alone. There is a Deity that can save him. Matt 7:29, John 10:10, 1 Tim 2:4.</p>
<p><b>3. ETHICS</b> Moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because man creates and develops his future. . . . He strives for the good life here and now.</p>	<p><b>3. ETHICS</b> Moral values are reflections of God's revelation to man in the Ten Commandments (enlarged and supplemented by Old and New Testaments). All values . . . have their source of authority, sanction and meaning in the eternal truths God has revealed. Ps 19:7-14; Matthew 5:3-20; John 14:15.</p>

Note:- Observations on Humanism are based on "Human Manifesto II, 1973" and are abstracted from sections 1 and 3 of the full statement as presented in the Sep/Oct., 1980 issue of "The Humanist".<sup>6</sup> One cannot over-emphasize the fact that the direction the humanists propose and the direction the Christian sets is determined by the particular philosophy of each - a point which will be illustrated a little later.

In order to place in perspective the nature and extent of the formal school curriculum requirements imposed by secular education authorities the following extracts from recent Australian Federal Department of Education authorities are presented. In a May 23, 1988 press release the Federal minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr J.S. Dawkins, stated that "there is now a clear need to address the practical business of schooling, in the context of agreed national objectives and priorities.", and that "Australia can no longer afford fragmentation of effort." <sup>7</sup> This apparently well intended statement, however, implies more control over the private education sector than heretofore. This is clearly indicated further on in the same release. "A common curriculum framework is needed to set out the major areas of knowledge and the most appropriate mix of skills for all students." And again "Another feature should be criteria for determining content in major subject areas." <sup>8</sup>

During the same month portions of a document (not identified but clearly from the same source) were obtained which contained further information relating to increased authority and control by government over the curriculum. While this second document repeated much of the information contained in the first release, several items proved both informative and startling. In the opening paragraph the schools of Australia (both public and private) are credited as having "been the socialising and humanizing environment" for Australian society. <sup>9</sup> On the next page the document notes that the state claims "primary responsibility for the education of our young people." <sup>10</sup> This responsibility is considered by government to extend into "methods of assessing the achievement of curriculum objectives" and "teaching practice." <sup>11</sup> In a final bid for educational conformity the government lists four ways of "maximizing their investment in education". The second item listed for special attention is the "removal of unnecessary differences in schooling across the nation." <sup>12</sup> This last statement is of major concern to school administrators and teachers in the private sector. Private schools have traditionally been established under a distinctive philosophy and it is this uniqueness which has ensured their continued existence. With curriculum differences removed and conformity the mode, private schools will then have little reason to exist. The choice for private education in Australia appears to be conformity or closure. It is this scenario that urges private Christian schools to maintain their distinctiveness.

Current government approaches to the introduction of a prescribed common formal curriculum specifying content, teaching practice and assessment techniques with the final objective of removing unnecessary differences between public and private schools has been presented albeit briefly. It would now appear helpful to review some concerns expressed by other people.

In *The Bulletin* of February 4, 1986 the cover article by Tony Abbott, journalist for that weekly news magazine, presents a fairly accurate picture of the current educational scene in Australia. The title of the article "Why our schools are in a mess - a stew of self interest" really gives the game away. In the opening paragraph he notes "Like society, the education systems are pulling in different directions at once". While endeavouring to uphold what is termed traditional values, schools are also supposed to create a new society through decentralized decision making, community participation and greater equality. Again in Tony Abbott's words, "Too often the result is confusion". Rather sadly he admits that "Today, traditional values are under such challenge that a set of 'mainstream' values is said no longer to exist". With schools admittedly the most potent socializing force, Geoffrey Partington, senior lecturer at Flinders University is quoted as saying that "departmental curriculum units tend to be dominated by 'neo-Marxists'."<sup>13</sup>

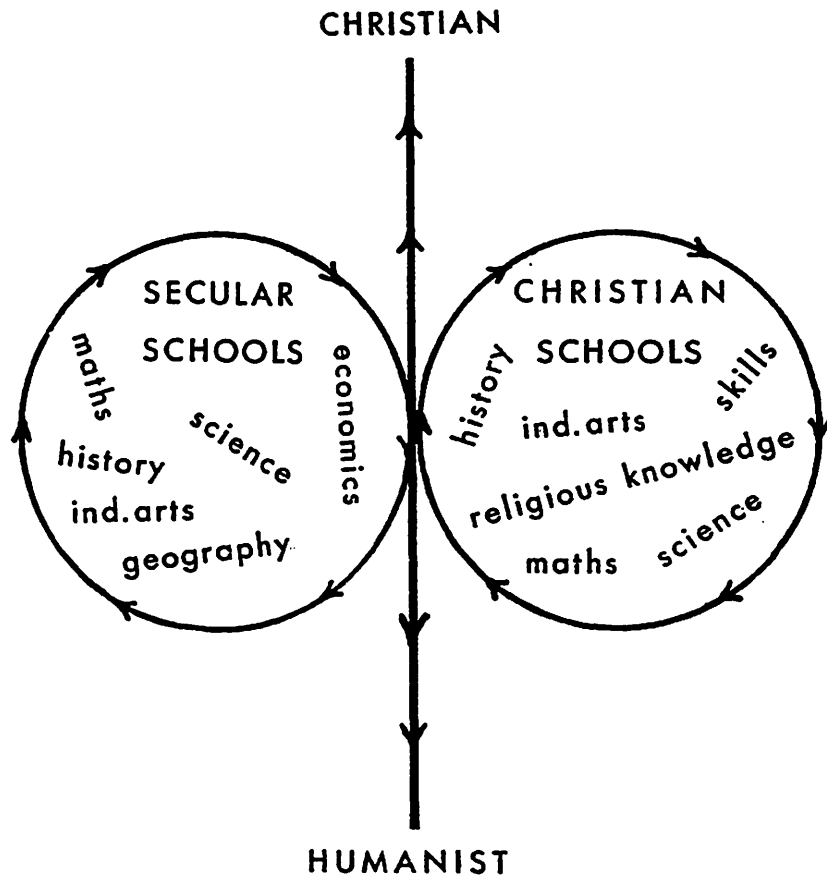
Abbott refers to Dr Ken McKinnon, a former chairman of the Commonwealth Schools Commission and Victoria's State Board of Education and currently Vice-Chancellor of Wollongong University, who is considered to be one of Australia's foremost educators. McKinnon observes the differing ideologies in today's educational scene and comments that "the most important factor in the development of schools is the climate of opinion". This "climate of opinion", he claims, provides fertile ground for the process of "natural selection" and for the "survival of the fittest" in education.<sup>14</sup> With terms such as these being bandied about in educational circles it does not take much imagination to perceive the "direction" the secular education programme is taking.

The impact on the private school sector of this philosophy and approach seems slow but sure. Coupled with the increasingly prescriptive nature of the curriculum as developed by state education departments and greater controls, "accountability" is the current in-word, imposed by both state and Commonwealth education authorities it is little wonder that the private sector feels anxious about the future of their schools - both in regard to identity and existence.

This increasing dichotomy between the secular and Christian schools may be graphically illustrated by the use of a simple geometric model. The two circles suggest two systems and the tangential line indicates direction.

Figure 1 presents the model.

FIGURE 1



While it is recognized that one should not press an illustration too far lest it lose its primary meaning, it may be suggested that this diagram portrays fairly vividly the ultimate direction the the two school systems take. Note the following:

1. Both the secular and the Christian systems are believed by their proponents to be complete and offer a fully rounded and balanced education. The two circles indicate relative completeness.



2. The arrows on the circumference of both circles indicate that both systems are active and are moving towards predetermined goals. Although strategies and techniques may change, the ultimate goal of each system is set.

3. To the casual observer the two systems display similarities in formal curriculum design and selection of subjects. Each offers a range of subjects designed to achieve the goals of their system. Knowledge and skills are regarded as essential by both.

4. Both systems appear to have much in common. There may be interaction - the point of contact. This is depicted by the two circles touching at one point on the circumference. This is, however, the **critical** point for it is here that the direction of each becomes apparent. With the two circles rotating in the same direction at the tangential point the direction of each is simply and obviously opposite. To borrow another geometric phrase, the one line projects in a direction which supports the Christian perspective while the other leads to the opposite humanist position.

5 Finally and inevitably the differences in direction must reduce the areas of commonalty to practically zero. Co-existence becomes impossible. Conformity, as government perceives it, seems the only solution.

According to Abbot many in the private sector believe that government may well have a "hidden agenda" and wonder whether the numerous Commonwealth "accountability" requirements which apply only to the private school sector may not eventually result in the integration of most private schools into the public school system.<sup>15</sup> In this climate of uncertainty Tony Abbott concludes his article with the following statement "OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS A PROPHET".<sup>16</sup>

It may be submitted that Mr Abbott, in his rather startling statement, demonstrated more insight and perception than he perhaps realized. To the Seventh-day Adventist Christian the need for prophetic guidance is well established and perhaps no where more so than in the teaching-ministry of the church. What then may the Christian educator, on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, set as its "Priorities of Faith"? Those distinctives that will maintain momentum and continue to give direction to Adventist schools.

### **THE INTEGRATING FACTOR**

Arthur Holmes suggests that the solution to the "conform or close" issue may lie in a renewed emphasis in the integration of faith and learning. He makes the observation that unfortunately the "primary impact is still a **conjunction** of Christian witness with secular education rather than an **integration** into an education that is itself Christian".<sup>17</sup> Christian education must incorporate this further dimension. It is not possible to include Christian values as an optional extra in the curriculum - as a kind of deluxe edition of secular education. Frank Gabelein in his book **The Pattern of God's Truth** refers to Professor Gordon Clark of Butler University saying that Christian education is not merely "a pagan education with a chocolate covering of Christianity."<sup>18</sup>

In the introductory chapter Gabelein notes that Christian education can integrate what he terms the external and internal components of education. By external component he refers to somethings outside and beyond man, that is, the external dimension of Christian education has to do with God's truth. The internal component has to do with all aspects of education, its policies, its courses and even its day by day workings. Thus Gabelein notes: "Christian education is different. With all its inadequacies, failures and difficulties, it has something to which to tie itself . . . Christian education does not need to keep looking for the integrating factor; it already has this factor."<sup>19</sup> A few pages later he continues, "Christian education today has the one principle that can give learning a frame of reference spacious enough to comprehend all knowledge and dynamic enough to develop moral and spiritual maturity in the midst of a materialistic and violent age."<sup>20</sup>

Expressing the same idea from just a slightly different perspective, Holmes says that the purpose of Christian education is not "simply to offer a good education plus Biblical studies in a atmosphere of piety."<sup>21</sup> While the secular components of a good education are indeed desirable they are not the essence. Holmes notes that the whole idea of Christian education is to give the Christian the ability to "interpret and evaluate information, particularly in the light of Christian revelation."<sup>22</sup> To repeat - Christian education is not just an extension to secular education but a totally discrete programme. Not just the fourth 'R' (Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic and also Religion) but "a balanced physical, mental, spiritual, social and vocational education . . . with God as the Source of all moral value and truth."<sup>23</sup> It is in this context then that "in the highest sense, the work of education and the work of redemption are one "<sup>24</sup>

### **THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER**

While the thrust of this paper is admittedly on the integration of the Christian faith, ethic and perspective in the formal curriculum of the school it would be remiss if, by way of a reminder, no reference was made to the work, life and example of the Christian teacher in the Christian school. One may wonder why the apostle James provides this advice. "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness."<sup>25</sup> One might rightly conclude that teachers have a role of exceptional significance and grave responsibility. This is simply because teachers deal with people during the most formative years of their lives. Teachers not only impart knowledge and skills; they mold lives and shape character. Over and above the application of Biblical principles to a subject discipline, what the Christian teacher most lastingly teaches is himself. Some would plausibly deny that a Christian teacher should be expected to behave in any other way than quite simply as a good teacher. But there is a prime characteristic that one would expect a Christian teacher to manifest. This is a deep concern for his students as individuals. Paul the apostle recognized this when he personalized the atonement thus: "Who loved me and gave Himself for me".<sup>26</sup> The Christian teacher must likewise display God's concern for the individual.

In today's age of relativism and subjectivity, Christian witness was never more relevant. The Christian teacher will be anxious to witness to the existence of standards in every area of school life. "It is the teacher's personality and lifestyle that will stay longest with students . . . The loving teacher caring for the body, mind and soul of his pupils will be the feature which distinguishes the Christian school from its dehumanizing counterparts"<sup>27</sup> In response to the question as to the relative importance of the Christian teachers influence and lifestyle compared to the impact on students of a curriculum designed from the Christian perspective Holmes responded that the teachers personal influence might well be in the region of 80 percent.<sup>28</sup>

"While it has been suggested that the verbal influence of teachers is representative of their total instructional pattern there is now growing support for the claim that the non-verbal behaviours of teachers are as important as, if not more important than, their verbal behaviours."<sup>29</sup> This is the claim of Michael Kaye of the Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education (Sydney, Australia) in a study of the significance of non-verbal communication. Practically every movement and expression conveys a message which may, in fact, negate the verbalized message. Argyle identifies such non-verbal signals as gestures, head movements, body movements, posture, facial expression, direction of gaze, proximity and

spatial position, bodily contact, orientation, tones of voice, clothes and bodily adornment.<sup>30</sup> Teachers often overlook or are perhaps not aware that "pupils may learn more true meanings from non-verbal messages than they do from our verbalization".<sup>31</sup> Ellen White, some eight decades ago, realized the impact which one's total lifestyle has on others. She states succinctly "Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence. Every impulse . . . will produce its harvest".<sup>32</sup> Addressing a group of workers during the 1871 General Conference session on the subject of "Manners and dress of ministers" Ellen White urges care and prudence in matters which today would be classified as "non-verbal behaviour". The message closes with the following counsel "Our words, our actions, our deportment, our dress, **Everything** should preach . . . everything pertaining to our person should be a sermon."<sup>33</sup> In fact most people are unconscious of the non-verbal signals they are constantly emitting and that the "communication of interpersonal attitudes, feelings and emotions, are conveyed most effectively through the non-verbal channels."<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that because of this unconscious factor non-verbal communication also gives a fairly accurate picture of a person's philosophy, attitudes and character. "All that he [the teacher] desires his pupils to become, he will himself strive to be."<sup>35</sup>

#### **THE CHRISTIAN CURRICULUM**

Every Christian teacher must inevitably be conscious of the dual problem posed by the urge to reconcile the "secular" fields of knowledge with Bible and Christian truth in the context of an externally prescribed curriculum. How can the teacher make mention of God in the science lesson? To say that God sends rain is a theological and not a scientific statement. The success (or failure) of a particular nation cannot always be explained from a theological perspective. It is suggested, however, that every human activity, including that of science and history, ultimately pose moral and even theological questions.

Is it possible, one may ask, to give an adequate account of scientific phenomena except in a context that is ultimately metaphysical or religious? The Christian teacher is fully aware of the problems of integrating faith and learning but is nevertheless also in a position to suggest that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." (Prov 9:10). The Christian teacher will endeavour to present all subjects from the Christian perspective. Ellen White, referring to the teaching of science states it most appropriately. "Science, in order to be fully appreciated, must be viewed from a religious stand-point".<sup>36</sup> And again "Rightly understood, science and the written Word agree, and

each sheds light on the other. Together they lead us to God by teaching us something of the wise and beneficent laws through which He works."<sup>37</sup>

Of course the Biblical perspective is not limited to the sciences but must indeed form the basis and foundation in the teaching of every subject - an integration of the Divine Word with the whole curriculum. Knowledge of the Divine Will gained in the Bible class and from Christian teachers in a Christian school gives direction and perspective to all other subjects and influences attitudes to study. "the Bible is the Book of Books, and is most deserving of the closest study and attention. It gives not only the history of the creation of this world, but a description of the world to come. It contains instruction concerning the wonders of the universe, and it reveals to our understanding the Author of the heavens and the earth. It unfolds a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy."<sup>38</sup>

#### **A CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

In an endeavour to meet the growing need and indeed demand for an "integrated" curriculum for the K-12 school system in the South Pacific Division, a curriculum development program was proposed and inaugurated in 1987 with the appointment of one half-time Associate Director at Division level to care, initially, for the elementary area. During that year firm plans were developed to extend the program into the secondary level. The Division executive committee approved the appointment of a full-time Associate Director for the secondary level and extended the Associate Director (Elementary) to a full-time position. In addition approval was given, and funds provided, to second a total of 5 practicing teachers (over the two-year period-1988,1989) to the Unit as full-time research assistants.together with adequate secretarial and clerical help.

The mandate approved by the Division Executive Committee directed the Curriculum Unit to :

1. Develop a comprehensive statement of philosophy and objectives for the K-12 Adventist school system operating in Australia and New Zealand.
2. Prepare a 'Framework' document covering the elementary school curriculum and a series of 'Framework' documents for each subject offered in the secondary schools.in Australia and New Zealand.
3. At the secondary level list and classify by country and state the topics covered in each subject area and identify those topics which call for particular treatment from a Christian/Adventist perspective, and

4. Prepare resource and support materials covering the topics so identified.

It was estimated that the work outlined in the first three items plus substantial progress covering item four would take a minimum of two years. The teachers seconded for the two year period would assist in the development of the several Frameworks documents but would primarily conduct basic research in identifying resource material and in drafting support materials. After 1989 the two Associate Directors would conduct training programs, continue to develop, refine and update all documents and support materials, and monitor the various country and state curriculum requirements.

In the development of the program it was considered essential that teachers in the classroom be fully aware of what was being done and as far as possible involved in the whole process from the development of the philosophical statements, the design of the Frameworks documents and content of the support materials. The following development strategy was therefore adopted: (see figure 2 on page 15 for a diagram of the structure of the Curriculum Development Unit)

1. At both the elementary and secondary levels an Advisory Committee of practicing classroom teachers was appointed. This committee meets at least twice a year to advise the director on all aspects of the program. All documents and materials will finally be approved by the Division Board of Education. Committee members are also involved in keeping colleagues apprised of developments and also in piloting selected strategies and materials in their schools.
2. Curriculum Directors maintain direct contact with the elementary and secondary schools by annual visits which are promotional, informative and advisory.
3. In order to provide wide input into the curriculum development process and to ensure that teachers at the school level identify with the total program three types of consultation occur:
  - a. Regional curriculum seminars attended by all the teachers in a conference. These serve the purpose of providing two-way discussion on the development of the program and the particular modifications and application indicated for that area. It is noted that local conference territories usually coincide with State boundaries thus making this type of

meeting particularly appropriate when discussing specific state curriculum requirements and matters.

b. Advantage is taken of the two existing professional associations organized and managed by Adventist teachers in developing curriculum materials in specific subject areas. C.A.S.E (Curriculum for Adventist Secondary Educators) and C.A.P.E. (Curriculum for Adventist Primary Educators) chapters operate in the larger conferences and are used in an advisory and developmental capacity by the Curriculum Directors.

c. In the case of the secondary curriculum development program a third group is considered vital to the program. A Cluster Unit consists of three to five teachers under the chairmanship of the Director. Teachers are selected for their expertise and interest in a particular subject and are invited to serve on a Cluster Unit. A Cluster Unit meets at least twice a year at a local Adventist school geographically convenient to participants. The particular purpose of a Unit is to identify those topics in their subject area which invite specific Adventist input. Members also develop resource kits and materials which they pilot in their schools and which form a "model" for the development of other kits by selected teachers.

4. The total project also envisages the establishment of a Curriculum Development Unit to serve schools in the mission territories of the South Pacific Division. This extension of the program will be managed by a Director at Division level and the program has received tentative approval. It is anticipated that personnel will be appointed and the program under way by January 1989. Initially materials will be prepared for the use of teachers in the elementary schools in the mission territories and then attention will be given to the needs of the mission secondary schools. Materials will be provided for teachers and introduced through a series of in-service training courses.

The curriculum development program outlined in this paper is still in its infancy, being just over one year old. Much must still be accomplished and no doubt many hurdles crossed. It is anticipated that the program, under the sponsorship of the South Pacific Division and the direction of its Department of Education, will be of benefit to the hundreds of committed Adventist teachers in the countries served by the Division. It is hoped that through the presentation of this paper other Christian educators might be inspired to extend their work of integrating the Christian faith of the church into the totality of their school program. Counsel

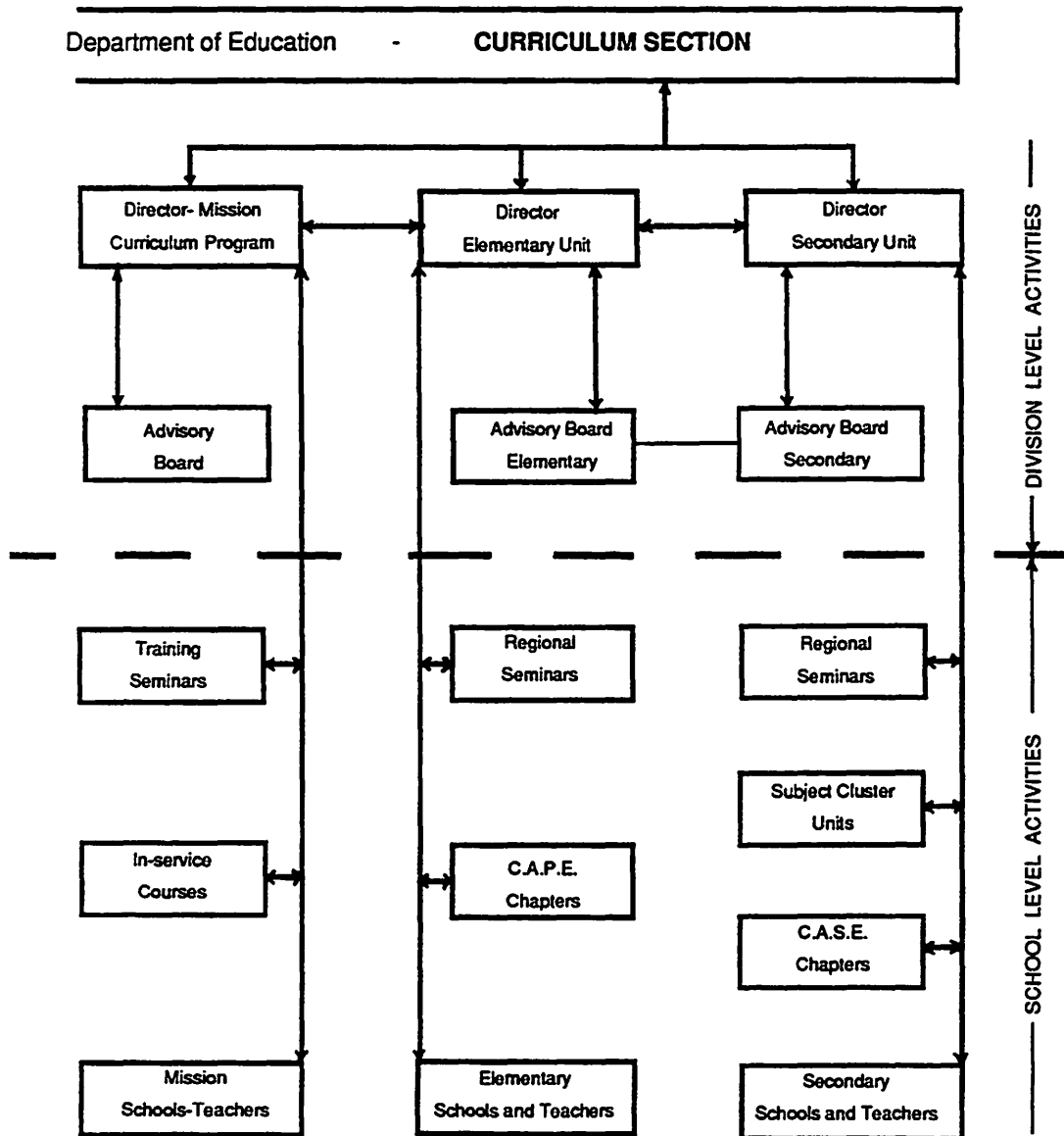
and advice from readers will be welcomed and it will be considered a privilege to share concepts and materials.

Contact address:  
Education Director  
South Pacific Division,  
148 Fox Valley Road,  
Wahroonga, N.S.W., 2076, Australia.



**FIGURE 2**

**INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING  
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM  
STRUCTURE AND FLOW CHART**



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